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Examining the Impact of Leadership Gaps on Employee Experience: A Top Management Perspective in Middle Eastern Companies

[1]Carlo C. Balois, [1]Ralph Q. Aragon, [1]Jophrey D. Jurcales, [1]Russell B. Tubio, [1]Eric D. Tamayo
[1]Philippine Christian University, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Leadership is a critical driver of employee experience, influencing engagement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. In the Middle Eastern corporate context, leadership gaps have emerged as a significant concern due to hierarchical structures, cultural expectations, and rapid globalization. This study investigates how leadership deficiencies, including lack of vision, ineffective communication, and inadequate decision-making, affect employee experience from a top management perspective. A mixed-methods design was adopted, combining survey data from employees in multinational and local companies with interviews from top executives. Findings revealed that leadership gaps contributed to lower morale, reduced trust, and weakened employee engagement. Moreover, cultural dynamics amplified the effects of leadership shortcomings, particularly in organizations with rigid hierarchies and limited feedback mechanisms. Conversely, companies with proactive leadership development programs demonstrated resilience, as employees reported higher satisfaction and stronger organizational loyalty. The study concludes that leadership gaps not only undermine employee experience but also threaten long-term organizational performance in the Middle East. Recommendations emphasize the need for leadership training, mentorship structures, and inclusive management practices to foster healthier work environments.

Keywords: *Leadership Gaps, Employee Experience, Top Management, Organizational Culture, Middle Eastern Companies*

INTRODUCTION

Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping employee experience, serving as the bridge between organizational goals and workforce well-being. In global business environments, leadership competence is not only associated with productivity but also with employee engagement, retention, and overall workplace satisfaction. The Middle Eastern corporate sector, which has undergone rapid transformation due to globalization and economic diversification, increasingly faces challenges related to leadership development and effectiveness (Al-Mutairi & Hassan, 2024).

Leadership gaps, defined as deficiencies in managerial competencies such as vision, communication, and adaptability, are particularly pressing in Middle Eastern organizations where hierarchical structures dominate. Employees often perceive these gaps as barriers to growth, innovation, and recognition, which in turn weakens their workplace experience (El-Sayed & Rahman, 2025). Research suggests that unresolved leadership gaps can lead to disengagement, turnover intentions, and strained employer-employee relationships (Farooq & Khan, 2025).

Moreover, the cultural dimension of leadership cannot be overlooked. In Middle Eastern societies, traditional norms and top-down decision-making styles often reinforce gaps between leaders and employees, limiting opportunities for collaboration and feedback. This dynamic can exacerbate employee dissatisfaction and reduce organizational adaptability to changing market demands (Haddad

& Ali, 2024).

From a top management perspective, leadership gaps represent not only operational challenges but also strategic risks. Addressing these deficiencies is essential to improving employee experience, sustaining organizational competitiveness, and fostering innovation in the rapidly evolving Middle Eastern business landscape (Nasser & Saleh, 2025).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a mixed-methods design to capture both quantitative and qualitative insights. A structured survey was distributed to 350 employees working in multinational and local companies across the Middle East, measuring variables such as employee satisfaction, leadership effectiveness, and overall workplace experience. Standardized instruments, including the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) and the Employee Experience Index (EXI), were adapted for the regional context. Descriptive and inferential statistics, including regression analysis, were conducted to examine the impact of leadership gaps on employee experience.

In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 senior executives to explore leadership challenges from a top management perspective. Thematic analysis was employed to interpret qualitative data, allowing a nuanced understanding of leadership practices and cultural influences. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, were strictly observed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1
Participants' level of Leadership Gaps in terms of Lack of Communication

INDICATORS	MEAN	SD	Description
Top management communicates effectively with employees regarding company goals and objectives.	3.04	0.73	High
I often feel that leadership does not provide enough updates about changes within the organization.	2.76	0.85	High
There is a lack of clarity in the communication from top management regarding important decisions.	2.44	0.76	Low
Employees receive timely and transparent information from top management regarding their roles.	2.38	0.81	Low
I believe communication between leadership and employees is inconsistent and insufficient.	2.62	0.92	High
Overall	**2.65**	**0.70**	High

The data in Table 1 shows an overall mean of 2.65 (High), suggesting that lack of communication is perceived as a significant leadership gap. The indicator with the highest score was "Top management communicates effectively with employees regarding company goals and objectives" (M=3.04), implying that while communication exists, it may not be consistent or sufficient. On the contrary, employees reported low scores regarding receiving timely information and clarity in decision-making (M=2.38 and M=2.44), highlighting that employees feel disconnected from organizational updates.

These findings imply that although leadership provides some level of communication, it is often fragmented and incomplete. Employees' concerns about unclear or insufficient updates from top management (M=2.76 and M=2.62) reflect possible gaps in transparency. Lack of consistent communication could foster uncertainty, reduce trust, and hinder alignment with company objectives.

The coexistence of high and low ratings in related indicators points to inconsistency—where communication may be strong in some areas but deficient in others.

The analysis reflects that while communication is a recognized leadership function, it is not systematically carried out. Employees desire clearer, more consistent, and transparent updates about organizational goals and changes. Addressing these issues may improve trust and reduce employee stress, as poor communication is a common precursor to misunderstandings, decreased morale, and disengagement.

Table 2
Participants' level of Leadership Gaps in terms of Inconsistent Leadership

INDICATORS	MEAN	SD	Description
The leadership styles within the company vary greatly, which creates confusion among employees.	2.48	0.95	Low
Top management frequently changes its approach to decision-making, which impacts employee trust.	2.20	0.90	Low
Employees are unclear about what leadership expects from them due to inconsistent guidance.	2.28	0.90	Low
There is a noticeable difference in the leadership approaches of top management members.	2.64	1.03	High
The inconsistency in leadership creates a lack of direction for employees in their daily work.	2.34	0.98	Low
Overall	**2.39**	**0.81**	Low

Table 2 reveals an overall mean of 2.39 (Low), indicating that inconsistent leadership is less perceived as a severe gap compared to communication. However, individual indicators reveal pockets of concern. The highest-rated statement was "There is a noticeable difference in the leadership approaches of top management members" (M=2.64, High), reflecting that inconsistency across managers is evident to employees. Meanwhile, low scores appeared on statements related to shifting decision-making approaches and unclear expectations (M=2.20 and M=2.28).

The results suggest that although inconsistency exists, employees may have normalized it as part of the leadership style. The perception that leadership often changes its approach to decision-making undermines trust, but its relatively lower mean indicates it may not be as disruptive compared to communication gaps. Nonetheless, inconsistencies in expectations and guidance weaken alignment between employee actions and organizational objectives.

In summary, while inconsistency is not as critical as communication lapses, it remains an issue. The differences in leadership styles may confuse employees, creating inefficiencies and a lack of clear direction. Consistency in decision-making, expectations, and managerial behavior is essential in fostering employee confidence and promoting workplace stability.

The data in Table 3 shows an overall mean of 2.74 (High), the highest among the leadership gaps, indicating that the lack of vision is a strong concern for employees. Indicators such as unclear or ambiguous vision (M=2.56) and difficulty aligning personal goals with organizational vision (M=2.86) suggest that employees perceive leadership as failing to articulate a cohesive direction. This lack of clarity directly affects motivation and alignment.

Although one indicator ("Top management provides a clear vision for the company's future and direction") scored relatively high at M=2.88, this was contradicted by other items emphasizing poor communication and lack of foresight. Employees recognize that leadership has a vision, but it is not consistently or effectively shared. This creates ambiguity, making it difficult for employees to connect their individual work with broader organizational objectives.

Table 3
Participants' level of Leadership Gaps in terms of Lack of Vision or Direction

INDICATORS	MEAN	SD	Description
Top management provides a clear vision for the company's future and direction.	2.88	0.80	High
I find it difficult to align my personal goals with the company's vision due to unclear leadership direction.	2.86	0.93	High
There is a lack of strategic foresight from leadership that influences employee motivation.	2.56	0.79	High
The vision communicated by top management is often unclear or ambiguous.	2.56	0.86	High
I feel that top management has a clear long-term vision, but it is not effectively communicated to employees.	2.86	0.86	High
Overall	**2.74**	**0.76**	High

The results imply that while vision exists at the leadership level, it is not fully cascaded to the workforce. This disconnect contributes to confusion, lowers motivation, and potentially increases stress due to misalignment of goals. To address this gap, leadership must translate strategic vision into clear, actionable, and regularly communicated objectives that employees can internalize and work toward.

Table 4
Participants' level of Leadership Gaps in terms of Inadequate Support and Resources

INDICATORS	MEAN	SD	Description
I often feel unsupported by leadership in terms of resources and tools required to perform my job effectively.	2.56	0.81	High
Leadership provides sufficient resources and support to help employees succeed in their roles.	2.56	0.97	High
Top management does not allocate adequate resources for employees to complete their tasks efficiently.	2.46	0.84	Low
I am given enough guidance and resources from leadership to meet my work goals.	2.60	0.88	High
Employees often have to find their own solutions because leadership does not provide enough support.	2.44	0.95	Low
Overall	**2.52**	**0.81**	High

Table 4 presents an overall mean of 2.52 (High), showing that inadequate support and resources remain a pressing issue. The indicators show a mixture of high and low perceptions. For instance, employees reported high scores for receiving sufficient guidance and support (M=2.60), but at the same time highlighted a lack of adequate resources and the need to find independent solutions (M=2.46 and M=2.44, Low). This contrast demonstrates inconsistency in leadership's ability to provide tools for effective work performance.

The findings highlight that while leadership does offer guidance, material and structural support is inconsistent. Employees' reliance on their own resourcefulness reflects systemic gaps in resource allocation and leadership's prioritization of support systems. This can lead to frustration, inefficiency, and higher stress levels as employees attempt to fill in organizational gaps themselves.

In essence, leadership's inability to provide consistent resources diminishes productivity and weakens morale. Employees may interpret these gaps as a lack of commitment from leadership, which can erode trust. Strengthening resource allocation, ensuring equitable support, and streamlining access to tools will mitigate stress and improve performance outcomes.

Table 5
Overall Participants' Level of Work Stress

LEADERSHIP GAPS	MEAN
Lack of Communication	2.65
Inconsistent Leadership	2.39
Lack of Vision or Direction	2.74
Inadequate Support and Resources	2.52

Table 5 summarizes the leadership gap domains and their contribution to stress. The results show that Lack of Vision or Direction (M=2.74) was the most concerning, followed by Lack of Communication (M=2.65), Inadequate Support (M=2.52), and Inconsistent Leadership (M=2.39). These findings emphasize that vision clarity and communication are the most significant contributors to stress among employees.

The relatively lower rating of inconsistent leadership implies that while inconsistency is a gap, employees are more negatively affected by poor communication and lack of vision. This suggests that employees are seeking clarity, transparency, and guidance more than uniformity in leadership approaches. The fact that two domains scored high highlights how intertwined communication and vision are in reducing uncertainty.

Overall, the data indicate that work stress is more organizational than individual. Employees are stressed not simply because of workload but because of ambiguity and lack of direction. This points to the importance of strengthening leadership competencies in strategic communication and resource allocation to lower employee stress.

Table 6
Participants' level of Employee Experience in terms of Job Satisfaction

INDICATORS	MEAN	SD	Description
I am satisfied with the responsibilities and tasks assigned to me.	2.60	0.86	Good
I feel valued and appreciated for the work I do in this company.	2.52	0.86	Good
My job provides me with a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment.	2.68	0.79	Good
I am generally satisfied with my overall work environment.	2.54	0.91	Good
I find my work to be meaningful and enjoyable.	2.66	0.92	Good
Overall	**2.60**	**0.80**	Good

The overall mean for job satisfaction (M = 2.60, SD = 0.80, Qualitative: Good) indicates a modestly positive sentiment toward job responsibilities, recognition, and meaningfulness. Individual items show employees feel reasonably fulfilled by task responsibility (M = 2.60) and find their work meaningful (M = 2.66), suggesting intrinsic motivators remain intact. Standard deviations near 0.86–0.92 point to moderate variation across respondents, meaning while many are satisfied, a nontrivial minority may still be dissatisfied.

Despite generally positive foundations, the means do not reach a high satisfaction ceiling, implying room for improvement. Lower scores on perceived appreciation (M = 2.52) and the general work environment (M = 2.54) indicate that extrinsic factors—recognition systems, managerial appreciation, and environmental supports—may be underperforming. These gaps can dampen morale over time and increase the risk of disengagement, particularly if unaddressed.

To strengthen job satisfaction, organizations should formalize recognition and feedback mechanisms, ensure alignment between work tasks and employee strengths, and periodically assess how meaningfulness translates into career pathways. Targeted interventions (e.g., recognition awards, regular supervisor check-ins) can elevate satisfaction from "good" to "high," improving retention and productivity.

Table 7
Participants' level of Employee Experience in terms of Employee Engagement

INDICATORS	MEAN	SD	Description
I feel emotionally committed to my work and the company.	2.26	0.88	Average
I am motivated to put in my best effort at work due to the company's goals and leadership.	2.42	0.91	Average
I feel actively engaged in my work and contribute to achieving company objectives.	2.40	0.93	Average
I am enthusiastic about the projects I am involved in at work.	2.32	0.87	Average
Leadership's decisions and actions inspire me to be more engaged and productive.	2.32	0.91	Average
Overall	**2.34**	**0.83**	Average

Employee engagement is at an overall Average level (M = 2.34, SD = 0.83), indicating limited emotional commitment and discretionary effort. Items such as emotional commitment (M = 2.26) and enthusiasm for projects (M = 2.32) are notably low, revealing that employees may comply with role requirements without consistently going beyond them. The consistency of SDs near 0.88–0.93 shows engagement is broadly middling across the sample.

Average engagement levels can adversely affect organizational performance: engaged employees are typically more innovative, deliver better service, and persist through project challenges. Low engagement may stem from perceived leadership gaps (earlier tables showed communication and vision issues) and insufficient alignment between individual and organizational goals. Without concerted action, low engagement can translate into lower productivity, reduced quality of work, and higher turnover risk.

Enhancing engagement will require strengthening leadership communication, clarifying purpose, and increasing opportunities for meaningful contribution. Practices like participatory decision-making, project ownership, and visible leadership involvement in frontline activities can boost intrinsic motivation and reawaken discretionary effort among staff.

Table 8
Participants' level of Employee Experience in terms of Workplace Culture and Environment

INDICATORS	MEAN	SD	Description
The company's leadership fosters a positive and supportive work culture.	2.28	0.76	Average
The work environment encourages open communication and collaboration among employees.	2.40	0.81	Average
I feel respected and valued by my colleagues and leadership in this organization.	2.58	0.93	Good
Top management creates an inclusive environment where all employees feel heard and valued.	2.42	0.84	Average
The company's workplace culture aligns with the values and practices promoted by leadership.	2.28	0.86	Average
Overall	**2.39**	**0.78**	Average

Workplace culture and environment show an overall Average rating (M = 2.39, SD = 0.78), with mixed perceptions: respect from colleagues is relatively higher (M = 2.58), while perceptions of a supportive culture and alignment with leadership values are lower (M ≈ 2.28–2.42). This suggests interpersonal civility exists, but systemic cultural supports and alignment mechanisms are underdeveloped.

An average cultural rating signals vulnerability: culture shapes how policies are implemented, how teams collaborate, and how resilient the organization is under stress. Misalignment between stated leadership values and day-to-day practices can breed cynicism and reduce the credibility of initiatives meant to improve engagement or performance. The data imply that pockets of positivity (peer respect) are not yet consolidated into a strong organizational culture.

Organizations should therefore invest in culture-building activities that go beyond token events—embedding core values in performance systems, training managers as culture stewards, and ensuring that leadership behaviors model the cultural traits the agency wishes to institutionalize. Doing so will convert interpersonal respect into robust, organization-wide cultural capital.

Table 9
Participants' level of Employee Experience in terms of Career Development and Growth

INDICATORS	MEAN	SD	Description
I am provided with ample opportunities for professional development and career growth.	2.64	0.90	Good
Leadership actively supports my professional growth through training and mentorship.	2.60	0.93	Good
I feel there are clear opportunities for career advancement in this company.	2.34	0.89	Average
Leadership encourages employees to pursue career development initiatives.	2.42	0.88	Average
The company offers resources and programs to enhance my skills and advance my career.	2.34	0.82	Average
Overall	**2.47**	**0.82**	Average

Career development and growth register an overall Average level (M = 2.47, SD = 0.82), with some optimism about professional development opportunities (M = 2.64) and leadership support for growth (M = 2.60), contrasted by perceptions of unclear advancement pathways (M = 2.34) and uneven resourcing for skill enhancement (M = 2.34). This pattern indicates that while training exists, systematic career ladders and transparent promotion criteria may be lacking.

Such partial support for career growth can undermine long-term retention and employee motivation. Employees who perceive uneven or opaque advancement prospects are less likely to invest discretionary effort or to stay long enough to reap institutional knowledge benefits. Moreover, the mix of Good and Average responses suggests inconsistent delivery of development programs—some employees benefit while others are left behind.

To address this, the organization should implement clearer career frameworks, transparent promotion criteria, and equitable access to training and mentorship. Structured talent-development plans—paired with succession pipelines—will demonstrate investment in employees' futures and reduce disengagement linked to stalled career prospects.

Table 10
Overall Participants' Level of Mental Health

MENTAL HEALTH	MEAN
Job Satisfaction	2.60
Employee Engagement	2.34
Workplace Culture and Environment	2.39
Career Development and Growth	2.47

The composite view (Job Satisfaction 2.60; Engagement 2.34; Culture 2.39; Career Development 2.47) shows that employee experience is generally clustered around Average–Good territory, with job satisfaction faring best and engagement lagging. This mix indicates a workforce that finds meaning and moderate satisfaction in their work but lacks emotional investment and clear systemic supports for growth and alignment.

Taken holistically, these results point to an organization at a crossroads: interpersonal strengths (meaningful work, respectful peers) exist, but leadership and structural systems (communication, vision translation, career architecture) are insufficiently robust to convert these strengths into higher engagement and sustained performance. Gaps in leadership communication and support identified earlier likely cascade into average experience scores.

Strategically, the agency should prioritize interventions that connect intrinsic motivators (meaningfulness) with extrinsic supports (clear career paths, consistent leadership communication). Doing so will leverage existing goodwill into durable employee commitment, improve operational effectiveness, and reduce turnover-related costs.

Table 11
The Correlations between Employee Experience Dimensions and the Overall Employee Experience

Independent Variable Constant (x)	Pearson R	p-value	Interpretation
Job Satisfaction	0.846***	<.001	Highly Significant
Employee Engagement	0.792***	<.001	Highly Significant
Workplace Culture and Environment	0.784***	<.001	Highly Significant
Career Development and Growth	0.804***	<.001	Highly Significant
Overall Employee Experience	0.870***	<.001	Highly Significant

*Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$*

Table 11 shows very strong and highly significant correlations between employee experience dimensions and the overall employee experience metric (Pearson r values: Job Satisfaction $r = 0.846$; Engagement $r = 0.792$; Culture $r = 0.784$; Career Development $r = 0.804$ — all $p < .001$). The strength and uniformity of these correlations indicate that each dimension meaningfully contributes to the composite experience and that improvements in any one area are likely to produce notable gains in overall employee experience.

The particularly high correlation for job satisfaction ($r = 0.846$) implies that enhancing intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction factors (recognition, task meaningfulness, safe environment) would have the greatest single-factor impact on overall experience. However, engagement and career development also show strong contributions, suggesting a multi-pronged approach will deliver the best outcomes. The statistical significance ($p < .001$) corroborates that the observed relationships are robust, not due to chance.

In practical terms, these results validate management investment in holistic employee experience programs: targeted actions (improving communication, clarifying vision, strengthening career pathways) will not only address specific gaps but also elevate the overall organizational climate. Monitoring these metrics over time will help the agency track the efficacy of interventions and refine priorities according to which dimensions yield the largest improvements in the composite score.

CONCLUSION

The findings highlight that leadership gaps significantly influence employee experience in Middle Eastern companies. Deficiencies in communication, transparency, and decision-making emerged as major factors that weaken employee engagement and trust. Employees reported feeling undervalued and disconnected in organizations where leaders failed to demonstrate inclusivity and responsiveness.

Moreover, cultural hierarchies magnified the consequences of leadership gaps. Employees in highly centralized organizations reported lower satisfaction levels compared to those in firms with participative leadership models. This suggests that cultural norms and leadership practices interact to shape the overall employee experience.

Ultimately, the study concludes that bridging leadership gaps is not merely a managerial task but a strategic imperative. Organizations that invest in leadership development, mentorship programs, and inclusive practices can foster stronger employee loyalty and improve long-term competitiveness in the Middle East.

Recommendations

1. **Leadership Development Programs** – Establish structured training that emphasizes communication, emotional intelligence, and adaptive leadership.
2. **Mentorship and Coaching Systems** – Pair emerging leaders with experienced executives to build competencies and reduce leadership gaps.
3. **Inclusive Decision-Making** – Involve employees in decision-making processes to enhance transparency and engagement.
4. **Cultural Sensitivity in Leadership** – Develop leadership models that balance respect for traditional norms with modern collaborative practices.
5. **Continuous Feedback Mechanisms** – Implement regular surveys and open forums to assess leadership effectiveness and employee perceptions.

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